

PROMOTION & YEAR-LOSS(ES)

INTRODUCTION

The current fifth year batch joined law school with **eighty** students. Due to a range of academic and other issues, **five** students left the university in the first two years. The batch lost **two** of their own to **suicide**. A total of **fourteen** students have been **denied promotion** across years, and had to reregister with their junior batches. This batch today has a mere **fifty-eight** students from their **original** batch of **eighty** students. Thus, over the years, the **Batch of (what once was) 2019** has lost a whopping **twenty-one** students (or **one-fourth** of the Batch) to the **system**. A significant percentage of those who were denied promotion with the original batch **once**, ended up with **repeated year-losses**.

This story is **not unique** to the Batch of 2019. A similar picture emerges on a cursory glance of the Promotion Lists of successive batches. The **mental health** of these students has been the **most neglected crisis** on this campus. The **vicious cycle of repeated year-losses**, coupled with lack of attention to the concerns of such students, has resulted in the current **systemic crisis**.

This is further compounded by the fact, that an overwhelming percentage of students with year-losses come from **marginalized communities**, resulting in the destruction of their self-esteem, and impeding their continued growth. As an illustration, in the second year batch, in the AY 2017-18, **7 out of 7 students** who were detained come from reserved categories. In the third year batch, in the same AY, **14 out of 21 students** who were detained came from reserved categories. In the fourth year batch, in the same AY, **6 out of 9 students** who were detained came from reserved categories. **These figures are staggering, without even accounting for religious, sexual, language-based, class-based, disability-based, or foreign national marginalization.**

This state of affairs reveals the **egregious systemic neglect of the mental health** of a sizeable portion of the student population. The system of promotions at law school is like **quicksand**. It drags its victims into a **never-ending abyss of repeated year-losses**. It disadvantages those it should protect, above all. A cursory comparison with other universities clearly indicates that this system needs an **immediate overhaul**.

A BRIEF COMPARISON

In the AY 2017-18, across batches, about **forty-five** students received year-losses in NLSIU **out of about 400+ students.**¹

The following table represents the batch-wise number of people who have received year-losses in NLSIU, in the AYs **2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18**. It is important to note that **this does not account for those who have left the university midway, which average 6-7 per incoming batch**. Further, **this only accounts for those who are detained in the Final Promotion List, and not the Provisional Promotion List, which would reveal an even more stark contrast.**²

| Academic Year | 1 st to 2 nd Yr. | 2 nd to 3 rd Yr. | 3 rd to 4 th Yr. | 4 th to 5 th Yr. | Detained in 5 th Yr. |
|---------------|--|--|--|--|---------------------------------|
| 2015-16 | 2 | 7 | 8 | 6 | 1 |
| 2016-17 | 2 | 4 | 13 | Not Available | Not Available |
| 2017-18 | 2 | 7 | 21 | 9 | - |

In comparison, the average number of year-losses in other law schools is as follows³:

| University | Avg. No. of Year Losses | Total Strength |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| NALSAR University of Law | 11 | 600+ |
| NLIU | 10-12 | 640+ |
| NUJS | 8-10 | 635+ |
| NLU Delhi | 12 | 400+ |

¹ Based on Promotion Lists released by the Examination Department, NLSIU.

² For instance, in AY 2016-17, in the third year batch, the Final Promotion List reveals 13 year losses, whereas the Provisional Promotion List reflects 27 year losses. This is an enormous variance, and further reveals the actual magnitude of problems faced by students.

³ Based on reports from students of the respective universities.

A SYSTEMIC CRISIS

- A. Academic Pressure; Adjustment Problems; Culture Shock
- B. Marginalized Communities at Higher Risk
- C. Repeat Culture to Multiple Carries
- D. Carries Transforming into Year Losses
- E. Year Losses Resulting in Changed Batch & Loss of Support
- F. Mental Health Impact: Isolation, Depression, Self Doubt & Inertia
- G. Self Perpetuating Vicious Cycle of Repeated Year-Losses**

By way of illustration, in the AY 2017-18, **out of about forty-five students who were detained, nine were given their 2nd year loss, two were given their 3rd year loss, five were given their 4th year loss, and one was given her 6th year loss.** Thus, about 40 % of those who were detained in AY 2017-18 were on their 2nd or further year loss.

As illustrated above, the system of promotion is defective, in so far as it fails to account for the mental health effects on the students. The system is not conducive to the well-being, both physical and mental, of any student. Those students who find themselves entangled in this vicious cycle of repeated year losses find it **difficult to escape the loop**. This may manifest itself in various forms of mental illness, driving students to the very edge. It has been seen that this may also lead to students taking extreme steps, as a consequence.

MENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVE

To gain a fuller understanding of the mental effects of the above system, an opinion was sought from [REDACTED] who has been serving as the **College Counsellor** for over four years. Her professional opinion is attached herewith, on the next page. She writes,

“... In case they falter in one trimester, there are possibilities of losing motivation due to mounting anxiety, which can also lead to other mental health issues. The prospect of losing a year can be panic inducing. ... In these circumstances, when students lose a year, they go through a lot of shame, humiliation, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, etc. It is generally difficult for them to bounce back, which again depends on their resilience. They tend to emotionally isolate themselves; the prospect of sitting with juniors and losing friends who were batch-mates, doesn’t help either. ... Some symptoms of student’s mental health being at risk in these circumstances could be, not attending classes, emotionally isolating themselves, staying in the room most of the time, neglecting eating meals on time, not sleeping adequately, not participating in college activities, not engaging with friends, self-harm, talking about suicide, etc. It is necessary for the community to be proactive at this time and deliberate and explore different options that could help mitigate the difficulties of students who face year losses.”

An opinion was also sought from [REDACTED] **Psychologist & Cognitive Hypnotherapist**, who is currently also serving as a **College Counsellor** at NLSIU. Her professional opinion is attached herewith, on the next page. She writes,

“In this situation having a single carry on also serves as a huge stressor bringing in a lot of emotional turmoil that they have to deal with. Hence the repercussions of a year loss are something that is unimaginable. Sometimes a situation like this could further lead to spiraling in negative cognitions, getting further demotivated and developing an over all sense of avolition. This can further manifest into feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, a condition which is very difficult to come out of.”

The two opinions, from those who have been in **close touch with the state of mental health on campus** clearly demonstrate the pitfalls of the system, and the **urgent need for reform**.



Opinion Regarding Mental Health

Mon, Apr 1, 2019 at 2:11 PM

To: "Student Bar Association, NLSIU" <[REDACTED]>

Dear Chandni and Suyash,

In this regard, I would like to share my observations and thoughts.

When a student starts his course in a College like NLSIU, there are several adjustments that she/he has to make, like emotional, social, academic and financial. Every student is unique and has his/her own strengths and limitations. The hectic pace of the course schedule, the need to participate in different co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, ensuring that they have a good CV, the competitive nature of the Institution in general leaves them with conflicting emotions and self-doubts. They are generally on their toes and are trying to hold all the threads pertaining to academics, relationships with friends, their own health, career prospects, etc. This can create immense pressure on them, the expectations from parents, the Institution, their own internal expectations, their fear of failure, their perception of not being good enough students, can cause a lot of anxiety and panic. The college does have a mentorship programme in place, which is of immense value, nonetheless, the extent to which students seek support and guidance from their mentors depends on their personality.

In case they falter in one trimester, there are possibilities of losing motivation due to mounting anxiety, which can also lead to other mental health issues. The prospect of losing a year can be panic inducing. I am talking only about the issues that can arise due to the stress and pressure that the circumstances around them at college present and not the anxieties and other issues that some of them are dealing with already before they enter college for various reasons. In these circumstances, when students lose a year, they go through a lot of shame, humiliation, loss of self-esteem and self-confidence, etc. It is generally difficult for them to bounce back, which again depends on their resilience. They tend to emotionally isolate themselves; the prospect of sitting with juniors and losing friends who were batch-mates, doesn't help either. We don't know to what extent they get support and compassion from family and friends either. In these circumstances the community to which the students belong has no other option but to step up and ensure that the students are given the emotional support that they need. Counselling services at College are available no doubt, but how many of them seek help is not clear.

Some symptoms of student's mental health being at risk in these circumstances could be, not attending classes, emotionally isolating themselves, staying in the room most of the time, neglecting eating meals on time, not sleeping adequately, not participating in college activities, not engaging with friends, self-harm, talking about suicide, etc. It is necessary for the community to be proactive at this time and deliberate and explore different options that could help mitigate the difficulties of students who face year losses.

[REDACTED] would be eager to support in this initiative.

Warm Regards,

[REDACTED] Counsellor

[Quoted text hidden]

March 2019

Report on Counseling
National Law School India University
Bangalore

One of the most prevalent conditions experienced by most of the students I meet on campus is stress and inability to adapt and adjust to new and different environment.

A big majority of my students have shared that the reason for their distress and anxiety is performance related. A lot many have to say that they suffer from insomnia and recurrent negative cognitions due to stress and anxiety stemming from fear of performance and failure.

Negative cognitions are a pattern of thinking and assuming the worst. It is problem oriented thinking and not solution oriented. Students who come to NLSIU are from various cities, big and small, but one thing that is common to most of them is that they have been toppers in academics in their field. However, once they come to NLSIU the entire picture changes as they are now competing with students alike. Which further means that they may not be toppers anymore which takes a huge hit on their self worth and self esteem. This factor also in the long run creates a void in their lives. It takes time to unlearn a negative cognition pattern and learn positive thinking and building resilience which is achieved through cognitive restructuring. Most of the times these students come to a counsellor when their anxieties have gotten quite severe and they are in no position to deal with their distress anymore. Most times it takes more than a trimester to help them get to a better place where they can get back to leading a normal life and participate in their daily life chores. In this situation having a single carry on also serves as a huge stressor bringing in a lot of emotional turmoil that they have to deal with. Hence the repercussions of a year loss are something that is unimaginable. Sometimes a situation like this could further lead to spiralling in negative cognitions, getting further demotivated and developing an over all sense of avolition. This can further manifest into feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, a condition which is very difficult to come out of.

It is important for us to look into these conditions and see how we can help the students best to make the situation conducive for better mental health which in turn will only help them become better performers, competent achievers and life long learners.